

Critical Incident Policy

Introduction:

In Scoil Mhuire we aim to protect the well being of our pupils and staff by providing a safe, tolerant and well catered for environment.

The BOM through the Principal, the Staff and the Parents Association has drawn up a critical incident management plan. We have established a Critical Incidents Management Team to steer the development and implementation of the plan.

What is a Critical Incident?

'A critical incident is any incident or sequence of events which overwhelms the normal coping mechanism of the school and disrupts the running of the school'.

Examples:

- Death, major illness/outbreak of disease (Foot & Mouth)
- Criminal incidents, e.g. a shooting,
- Major accidents, serious injury (e.g. RTC)
- Suicide
- Civil unrest, war (foreign nationals may be traumatised by events that happened in their country of origin)
- Fire, natural and technological disaster
- Disappearance of student from home or school
- Unauthorised removal of student from school or home.
- World events that may affect the student body and/or staff. May be a need for provision of discussion and involvement in ceremonies e.g. 9/11, tsunami

Critical Incidents Management Team consists of :

Mary Elizabeth Price (Principal)

Breda Nugent (Deputy Principal)

Josephine Henry, Chairperson, BOM

Student Liaison, Chaplaincy Role, Family Liaison Role, Parents Association Rep, Board Rep, the names of whom are available in the office.

Creation of a coping supportive and caring ethos in the school

We have put systems in place to ensure the safety on many levels of children, staff and visitors to Scoil Mhuire. Other policies also feed into the Critical incident Plan in that they are designed to lessen the probability of the occurrence of an incident. These include measures to address both the physical and psychological safety of both staff and students.

Physical safety:

The following policies and strategies have been put in place in order to maintain the physical safety of all members of the school community.

- Health & Safety Statement.
- Administration of Medication Policy
- First Aid Policy as part of Health and Safety Statement
- Evacuation plan formulated.
- Regular fire drills occur.
- Fire exits and extinguishers are regularly checked.
- The Fire Alarm is serviced regularly, at least once a year.
- Playground gates are closed firmly during school hours.
- Pupils leaving early will only be released by a member of teaching staff when an authorised adult arrives to accompany the child from the premises. Such departures are recorded in the 'Sign Out' book.
- Pupils are not released into the care of persons unknown to school staff without checking with a parent/ guardian.
- Pupils are reminded of playground rules by staff at regular intervals in the context of our School Code of Behaviour.
- First Aid box is kept and maintained in the kitchenette and hall. Travel kits are available for outings of any sort.

Psychological Safety

Scoil Mhuire aims to create an open and encouraging environment in the school where students can talk about their difficulties and seek help for same. The following strategies aim to support and ensure the psychological well-being of our pupils:

- SPHE is an integral part of the school curriculum and addresses issues such as: wellbeing, grief and loss, communication skills, stress and anger management, conflict management, problem solving, help-seeking, decision making, and alcohol and drug prevention.
- School Anti-Bullying Policy.
- Substance / Alcohol Misuse Information as part of SPHE.
- Child Safeguarding Policy.
- Staff are informed of difficulties affecting individual students and are aware of and sensitive to their needs.
- Staff have access to books and resources on difficulties affecting the primary school child.
- The school has developed links with outside agencies, which may be contacted in the event of an emergency and for onward referral of students.

Roles and Responsibilities

1. Principal/ Deputy Principal:

- Confirm the event
- Activate the Critical Incident response team and inform the Board of Management
- Liaise with the Gardaí/Emergency services as required

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- Lead briefing meetings for staff on the facts as known, give staff members an opportunity to express their feelings and ask questions,
- Deputy Principal to keep live record of events and decisions as they unfold for the BOM and for any possible further investigation.
- outline the routine for the day
- Express sympathy to family
- Clarify facts surrounding event
- Make contact with other relevant agencies
- Decide how news will be communicated to different groups (staff, pupils, outside school)

After the incident/event

- Ensure provision of ongoing support to staff and students
- Facilitate any appropriate memorial events
- File records and inform insurance company where required
- Review Plan

2. Communication Role:

- With Team, prepare a public statement if required
- Organise a designated room to address media promptly
- Ensure telephone lines are free for outgoing and important incoming calls
- Designate mobile numbers for contact
- Liaise with relevant outside support agencies

- Review and evaluate effectiveness of communication response

3. Student Liaison/ Counselling Role:

Initial intervention:

- Advise the staff on the procedures for identification of vulnerable pupils
- Alert staff to vulnerable pupils
- Outline specific services available in the school
- Put in place clear referral procedures
- Address immediate needs of staff
- Provide materials for staff (from critical incident folder)
- Provide information
- Provide counselling

Medium Term intervention:

- Provide ongoing support to vulnerable students
- Monitor class most affected
- Refer as appropriate
- Review and evaluate Plan

4. Chaplaincy Role:

- Visit home(s), if appropriate

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- Assist with prayer services
- Make contact with other local clergy
- Be available as personal and spiritual support to staff

- Provide follow-up support to families as required and/or requested
- Work in partnership with Critical Incident team
- Review and Evaluate Plan

4. Family Liaison Role:

- Co-ordinate contact with families (following first contact by Principal)
- Consult with family around involvement of school in e.g. funeral service
- Assist with all communication dealing with parents of any student affected by critical incident
- Provide ongoing support to families affected by the incident
- Involve, as appropriate, the family in school liturgies/memorial services
- Offer to link family with community support groups
- Review and evaluate plan

Action plan

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS (Day 1)

- Immediate contact with family/families
- Consult with the family regarding appropriate support from the school, e.g. funeral service
- Ensure that a quiet place can be made for students/staff

Media Briefing (if appropriate)

- Designate a spokesperson (Leader)
- Gather accurate information
- Prepare a brief statement (Team)
- Protect the family's privacy
- It is important to obtain accurate information about the incident
 1. What happened, where and when?
 2. What is the extent of the injuries?
 3. How many are involved and what are their names?
 4. Is there a risk of further injury?
 5. What agencies have been contacted already?
- Contact appropriate agencies
 1. Emergency services
 2. Medical services
 3. H.S.E. Psychology Departments/Community Care Services
 4. NEPS

BOM/ DES/Schools Inspector

- Convene a meeting with Key Staff/Critical Management Team

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- Organize a staff meeting, if appropriate
- Ensure any absent staff members are kept informed
- Organise timetable/routine for the day. (Adhering to the normal school routine is important, if this is possible)
- Class teachers to take note of any absentees who might need to be contacted, list of friends etc, or any other relevant information. This is to be given to the Student Liaison person
- Arrange supervision of students
- Liaise with the family regarding funeral arrangements/memorial service
- The Chaplain/Principal will liaise with the family, to extend sympathy and clarify the family's wishes regarding the school's involvement in funeral/memorial service
- Arrange a home visit by two staff representatives within 24 hours, if appropriate. (Student Liaison person + Class teacher)
- Have regard for different religious traditions and faiths

MEDIUM-TERM ACTIONS (24-72 HOURS)

- Preparation of students/staff attending funeral
- Involvement of students/staff in liturgy if agreed by bereaved family
- Facilitation of students/staffs responses, e.g. Sympathy cards, flowers, Book of Condolences, etc.
- Ritual within the school
- Review the events of the first 24 hours
- Reconvene Key Staff/Critical Incident Management Team
- Decide arrangements for support meetings for parents/students/staff
- Decide on mechanism for feedback from teachers on vulnerable students
- Have review of Critical Incident Management Team meeting
- Establish contact with absent staff and pupils
- Arrange support for individual students, groups of students, and parents, if necessary
- Hold support/information meeting for parents/students, if necessary, in order to clarify what has happened
- Arrange, in consultation, with outside agencies, individual or group debriefings or support meetings with parental permission
- Plan for the re-integration of students and staff e.g. absentees, injured, siblings, close relative etc)
- Student Liaison person to liaise with above on their return to school.
- Plan visits to injured
 - Family Liaison person + Class Teacher + Principal to visit home/hospital
 - Attendance and participation at funeral/memorial service (To be decided)
 - Decide this in accordance with parent's wishes, school management decisions and in consultation with close school friends
- School closure (if appropriate)
- Request a decision on this from school management
- LONGER TERM ACTIONS

Monitor students for signs of continuing distress

If over a prolonged period of time, a student continues to display the following, he/she may need assistance from the Health Board. Constant communication with family is essential.

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- Uncharacteristic behaviour
- Deterioration in academic performance
- Physical symptoms — e.g. weight loss/gain, lack of attention to appearance, tiredness, restlessness
- Inappropriate emotional reactions
- Increased absenteeism

Evaluate response to incident and amend Critical Incident Management Plan appropriately

- What went well?
- Where were the gaps?
- What was most/least helpful?
- Have all necessary onward referrals to support services been made?
- Is there any unfinished business?

Formalise the Critical Incident Plan for the future

- Consult with NEPS Psychologist
- Inform new staff/new school pupils affected by Critical Incidents where appropriate
- Ensure that new staffs are aware of the school policy and procedures in this area
- Ensure they are aware of which pupils were affected in any recent incident and in what way
- When individual pupils or a class of pupils affected by an incident are transferring to a new school, the Principal should brief the Principal of the new school

Decide on appropriate ways to deal with anniversaries (Be sensitive to special days and events)

- Anniversaries may trigger emotional responses in students/staff and they may need additional support at this time
- Acknowledge the anniversary with the family
- Need to be sensitive to significant days like Birthdays, Christmas, Mother's Day, and Father's Day
 - Plan a school memorial service
 - Care of deceased person's possessions. What are the parent's wishes?
 - Update and amend school records

Ratified by the Board of Management on 13 March 2018

Review Date: as required with regular staff review.

Signed: *Josephine Henry* Chairperson.